

FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

9A 22	Georgetown		GEO.102
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Town/City: Georgetown

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Elm Street Area

Photograph



View from E

Address: 137 Elm Street

Historic Name: Abigail Perkins House

Uses: Present: residence

Original: residence

Date of Construction: ca. 1838

Source: historic maps, deeds

Style/Form: Greek Revival

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Garage (attached)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

additions

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.25 acre

Setting: This property is on the west side of Elm Street in the triangle created by the junctions of Elm, Brook, and Central Streets on a lot with mature hardwoods and softwoods. Elm Street is primarily residential

Locus Map



Recorded by: Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson

Organization: Georgetown Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): January 2010

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

137 Elm Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Abigail Perkins House is a story-and-a-half wood frame dwelling with a gable roof and wood clapboard siding built c. 1832. It is situated on a quarter-acre lot on the east side of Elm Street. A lawn surrounds the house; the parcel is framed by tree lines. A short driveway on the south side of the house connects the street to a garage connected to the house.

The house is a smaller version of the two-story, single-pile houses with chimneys on their back walls that are concentrated at the north end of Elm Street, most of which are attributed to housewrights Joseph and John Kimball. In this way it is also similar to the story-and-a-half houses at 98 and 126 Elm Street. The five-bay front façade has a center entrance within a Greek Revival-style trabeated architrave. Five short windows are spaced across the upper story, a feature the other houses do not have. The north wall contains the typical one window in each story, while the south wall has two windows on the first story and one in the attic, a variation on the norm. The rear chimneys are visible only from the rear and they are encased by a large saltbox winif on the rear. The existing six-over-six sash (six-pane casements or sliders in the half-story) appear be original.

A large non-historic garage with a front gambrel roof was constructed south of the house; it contains two vehicle bays with overhead doors and a loft door centered under the roof. It is attached to the house by a gable roof connector that abuts the rear shed extension; an entrance is centered in the façade exposed on the east side.

The Abigail Perkins House is a distinctive example of early-19th-century domestic architecture on Elm Street, and it is an important variant of the single-pile, rear chimney house form that developed in the neighborhood. The property is a contributing feature of the Elm Street historic district.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

According to local histories, aside from the road (now Massachusetts Route 133) connecting Georgetown to its parent Rowley to the east and Andover on the west, Elm Street is one of the oldest streets in Georgetown, having been opened to "public travel" about 1686.¹ At that time between ten and twenty families lived in what was known as Rowley second (or west) parish or New Rowley. Beginning in the 1650s Rowley proprietors began to make land grants in the town's western reaches; in 1666-67, the town laid out three thousand acres in the area and granted John Spofford the job of penning cattle "the young cattle of the towne" where they had "been herded this last yeare." Pen Brook is named for these pens, which stood west of Elm Street. In 1732 families in the area successfully petitioned to form the Second Church of Rowley (ultimately Georgetown's First Congregational Church) and built a second meetinghouse at the junction of Elm and East Main Streets in 1769. In 1838 the General Court of Massachusetts incorporated Georgetown, which embraced most of the second parish.²

By 1800, according to a map showing the town center at that time, various branches of the Nelson family owned large tracts embracing both sides of Elm and Chestnut Street and both sides of Main Street in this section. All of these branches descended from Thomas Nelson (1615-about 1648), who was among the twenty families who had come to the New World in the winter of

¹ See, for example, Benjamin F. Arrington, ed., *Municipal History of Essex County in Massachusetts* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1922), 146.

² Thomas Gage, *The History of Rowley* (Boston: Ferdinand Andrews, 1840), 31-32, 320, 324, 326, 329.

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1638 with the Puritan cleric Ezekiel Rogers (1590-1666). With Rogers most of these families settled at Rowley, incorporated in 1639.

The extent to which Nelson family lands reached southward is not clear from the 1800 village map, but by 1830 the tract on which this property is sited probably belonged to "Deacon" Asa Nelson (1790-1855). The first Nelson to own the land in this section of Elm Street was Joseph Nelson (1682-1744), the grandson of the immigrant Thomas Nelson. According to local historian Henry Mighill Nelson, Joseph Nelson was the "first of this name to settle in Georgetown."³ A detailed title search would be necessary to establish early ownership firmly, but this tract ultimately descended not through the immigrant Thomas's son Philip, Joseph's grandfather, but through his son Thomas (1638-1712). Deacon Asa Nelson was the great great grandson of Thomas and lived at 123 Elm Street. His father David (1761-1847) was the cousin of Nathaniel Nelson (1767-1853), who in 1800 owned the land at the southeast side of the intersection of East Main and Elm Streets and lived at 8 Elm Street; his uncle Solomon (1742-1821) owned land on the west side of Elm Street that also bordered this junction.

No house is shown on this site on the 1830 town map, but by 1838 a house labeled "A. Perkins" is shown. Abigail Perkins (1771-1861) was the daughter of Cornelius and Mehitabel Balch of Topsfield. In 1790 she married Asa Bradstreet, who died three years later; vital records state that he was "killed by ye wheels of a loaded Waggon, which passed over his head." Two years later the widowed Abigail Balch Bradstreet married Daniel Perkins Jr. of Topsfield. Whether the family moved to Georgetown before or after Daniel Perkins's death is not yet known. By 1838, at any rate, Abigail Perkins appears to have been widowed again and residing on Elm Street. In 1850 she was 78 years of age and living with her daughter Permelia, neither with occupations, and by 1860 Perkins was one of three women on this section of Elm Street running a boardinghouse, no doubt for shoe workers at shops on Elm and Central Streets. She died in late June 1861 at the age of 89, and her daughter Permelia died twelve days later.

By 1872 Captain Moses Wright (about 1806-81), a boot and shoe manufacturer, owned 137 Elm Street. Also born in Topsfield, Wright married Hannah Merrill of Georgetown, whose father Thomas is said to have come to Georgetown from Groveland in 1750 and been the first to manufacture shoes for other than "family use." Hannah Merrill Wright died in 1865, and in 1868 Moses Wright married the widow Eunice Peabody Metcalf of Maine. Wright is shown as a boot treer in the 1880 census, which suggests that he may either have been working in one of the village's shoe factories or have been finishing shoes as part of the "putting-out system."⁴ The value of Wright's personal property was never more than moderate, and it seems likely that he worked in a shop on his property (a shop is listed there in 1933) and perhaps had journeymen and apprentices. In both 1870 and 1880 Wright boarded boot and shoe makers at 137 Elm. In addition Wright, like shoe manufacturer William B. Harriman of 72 Elm Street (not extant), was a committed abolitionist and, according to local historian Henry Mighill Nelson, "a personal friend of Garrison and all the early reformers" who presided over Georgetown's last antislavery meeting in 1860.⁵

Moses Wright died in 1887 and his widow Eunice probably remained at 137 Elm until she died in 1899. In 1900 the shoemaker Warren J. Witham lived on the property. Born about 1855 in New Durham, New Hampshire, Witham married Annie E. Danforth of Georgetown in 1875. In 1880 he was working as a laster, in 1910 as a shoe factory stock fitter, and in 1930 as a shoe cutter. In the mid-1910s he worked for Georgetown Boot and Shoe Corporation, founded in 1885. Witham still owned and occupied 137 Elm in 1933. In 1952 Donald T. McBrierty bought the property, and McBrierty sold it to Rutherford Associates in 1967; that company sold 137 Elm to current owners Roger and Susan Clay in 1967.⁶

³ Henry M. Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," in D. Hamilton Hurd. *History of Essex County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1888), 1: 812.

⁴ A boot treer finished the shoe but placing it on a last-shaped form and expanded it so that the shoe fits tightly over it; then the treer burshed the shoe, cleaned it, and used a hot iron to rub and smooth the shoe upper. See Blanche Hazard Evans, *The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts before 1875* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 167.

⁵ Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," 854. Jane Field, *A Brief History of Georgetown Massachusetts 1838-1963*, rev. ed. (Georgetown: Georgetown Historical Commission, 1988), 20, notes Field, 20: "Before the outbreak of the Civil War some of the boys wrapping shoes for Southern consignment folded them in copies of the Liberator, Garrison's anti-slavery sheet, but had to stop when the recipients in Charleston began to voice their objections to the factory management."

⁶ Donald T. and Barbara E. McBrierty to Rutherford Associates, 25 October 1967, SED 5488:500; Rutherford Associates to Roger and Susan Clay, 17 November 1967, SED 5493:83.

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MAPS

- "Map of the Centre of Georgetown in 1800." In Perley, Sidney H., "Centre of Georgetown in the Year 1800." *The Essex Antiquarian: A Quarterly Magazine Devoted to the Biography, Genealogy, History, and Antiquities of Essex County, Massachusetts* 2, 7 (July 1898): 201.
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[Delete this page if no Criteria Statement is prepared]

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible Eligible **only** in a historic district
- Contributing to a potential historic district Potential historic district

Criteria: **A** **B** **C** **D**

Criteria Considerations: **A** **B** **C** **D** **E** **F** **G**

Statement of Significance by Neil Larson and Kathryn Grover

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The Abigail Perkins House is a distinctive example of early-19th-century domestic architecture on Elm Street, and it is an important variant of the single-pile, rear chimney house form that developed in the neighborhood. The property is a contributing feature of the Elm Street historic district.

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View from NE



View from SE